

SCOTTSDALE'S NOTIFICATION POSTCARDS

an award-winning citizen notification program

1) An Innovative Idea:

The city of Scottsdale annually sent out more than 30,000 letters to property owners informing them of proposed development projects that are scheduled for upcoming public hearings. This process was time consuming, costly, and ineffective in encouraging interested parties to provide input. To ensure more effective community awareness and involvement, the city approached notification with a dual goal:

- a) To communicate more clearly and directly, using layman's language to encourage participation/awareness; and
- b) To simplify and reduce the time/cost involved with preparing community notices.

To that end, the city created a postcard template - so that recipients could:

- Read and understand information at a glance;
 - View a basic site map of the proposed project location;
 - Immediately see that they are being 'invited' to participate;
 - Be informed of proposed projects in their neighborhood; and
 - Be directed to additional resources for information, i.e. web site address for case fact sheets, availability of case files, and easy access to two main contacts - the applicant and the city staff person who is coordinating the case review.
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2) The Opportunity:

In Scottsdale, a community that has experienced rapid growth and where 70% of its citizenry have arrived within the last five years, the Planning & Development Services Department continually reviews its community notification process to ensure it is effective and informative. While state law governs some of the city's requirements related to public hearing notification, Scottsdale has maintained a policy of meeting and exceeding state requirements. In addition to legal notices in the newspaper, the city notifies all property owners within a 300 foot radius of the proposed development (750 foot radius for certain types of cases). In the past, the city informed property owners via a first class letter that was time consuming to prepare (creating mailing labels, copying the letter and stuffing envelopes) and the content of the letter was bureaucratic and technical.

While results of the city's annual communication survey indicate that direct mail is the most effective way to reach residents, there was a concern that the technical nature of the public hearing notices did little to encourage residents to understand the city's development process or to provide input. The postcard format acknowledges that some notice recipients may have never gotten past the envelope with the city seal; assuming it was a code violation, a photo radar notice, an increase in water fees or some other less than positive information.

3) The Solution:

To transition from the previous mailed 8 ½" X 11" letters to the postcard notices required a 6-9 month process and a team of 7 employees who took on the task in addition to their regular duties. The postcard was tested to ensure the mailing process was effective; during this testing phase the city mailed out duplicate "old style" letter notices to ensure all interested parties received adequate notification.

As part of this process, the city accessed the on-line postcard services available through the United States post office. By working with the post office on a weekly basis, the city was able to fine tune issues related to billing, turnaround, and record keeping.

The post office rates for one-color on-line post cards are 26¢ per card), and includes printing/production as well as postage - compared to the previous cost of \$1.22 per piece, which included postage and the additional expenses/time required for copying, labeling and inserting notices in an envelope. The post office system provides the city with a 2-day mailing turnaround; provides an electronic printout of all mailing database (for inclusion in the case file); and notifies the city by e-mail when the mailing is accepted and completed.

(Please note: the rate for these postcards was recently increased to 32¢ per card

4) The Result:

The cost savings from switching to the postcards was rolled back into our notification program, allowing for additional notices to be sent. We've added mailed notices for Development Review Board Cases and early notification postcards for ALL public hearing cases. Scottsdale now mails out more than 60,000 notices annually (Planning Commission, City Council, Development Review Board & Board of Adjustment cases).

One of the most telling benefits of this new process was observed at a recent community open house, where a majority of the attendees (approximately 100 people) had their postcard notice with them as a reminder of the meeting.

This is a response to a current development trend acknowledges a maturing community; one with an increase in infill/revitalization projects which need to be sensitive to adjacent property owners/neighbors.

This program won the 2002 U.S. Post Office's Idea Forum Award as well as the 2002 Arizona Planning Association Public Participation Award, and was recently presented at the 2004 Transforming Local Governments conference.

Please call our Community Resource Center at (480) 312-7800 for more information on how to incorporate this program into your municipality's citizen notification and involvement efforts.